

Department of Human Services

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Articles in Today's Clips Wednesday, June 20, 2007

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Day care kids tell of whippings of 3-year-old

Parents' rights challenged

June 20, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The key to the mystery of how 3 1/2 -year-old James Bradley Jr. died in a Van Buren Township foster home may lie with other children who saw James being mistreated, court documents reviewed by the Free Press disclosed Tuesday.

Children who were in the day care center operated by Christine Woodward out of her foster home told state social workers that James "always got in trouble because he would pee on himself," according to a Department of Human Services petition filed in Wayne County juvenile court Tuesday.

"Christine would whip him with a long black belt and sometimes with her hand," one child told a department worker investigating what happened in the foster home licensed to Woodward, 34, and her husband, Lasana Karva Sr., 37.

Two parents also told the department that they pulled their two children out of Woodward's day care center because they suspected she was mistreating them, records show.

Woodward and Karva were in juvenile court Tuesday, the day after a Detroit foster mother was convicted of negligent manslaughter in the beating death of 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge.

The Lethbridge case was another one in which adults and adolescents in the home had told police they saw and heard nothing to explain the horrific beating death of a foster child.

The state asked the court in a petition to terminate Woodward's and Karva's parental rights to their two children, a 15-year-old girl and an 11-year-old boy. The children were placed in the homes of relatives after visitation was suspended.

No criminal charges have been filed in James' death. The couple declined to comment on the advice of their attorneys. The Department of Human Services revoked Woodward's day care center license and the couple's foster care license shortly after James was fatally injured on April 8. He was declared dead April 13.

The petition to terminate the couple's parental rights was authorized by a court referee and will be scheduled for trial later on a judge's docket.

Woodward -- who had a day care license with the department for about 10 years -- and her husband became licensed foster parents last year through the Ennis Center for Children, which has operations in Flint, Waterford and Detroit.

James had been in another Ennis Center foster home but was removed in November because of an abuse incident involving another child, according to court records. He was placed with Woodward and Karva.

Around 10 p.m. April 8, Karva called 911 to report that James was not breathing. He was taken to Annapolis Hospital in Wayne and then flown to the University of Michigan's Mott Children's Hospital.

The statements Woodward, Karva and their children gave to police were generally consistent: James was found by Woodward's daughter in the master bedroom, crying and gasping. The family said he had not been injured before then, according to the petition.

But the U-M medical team found that the boy was brain dead resulting from injuries to his

head, internal bleeding and swelling, and that there were signs of previous abuse. James' injuries, the doctors said, were "most likely the result of abusive head trauma, severe child abuse," records show.

Van Buren Township Police Detective Bob Greene said the autopsy by Washtenaw County Medical Examiner Dr. Bader Cassin said James' death was a homicide and the result of head injuries inflicted by another person.

There were two previous reports of injuries to James in the home, records show.

On Jan. 29, James' mother, Rita King-Bradley, noticed during a visit with her son that there was a bump on the right side of his forehead. A doctor at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit did not find signs of abuse.

On March 24, a doctor noticed a burn and scarring on the back of James' right hand. Questioned by a Child Protective Services investigator, Woodward said she didn't know how James' hand was burned but offered that it could have been from hot water.

James told the investigator that he burned himself while trying to get a drink, apparently turning on the hot water tap. The Ennis Center documented that Woodward was not in compliance with regulations for setting the water heater so high.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

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June 20, 2007

Pattern of abuse alleged

Petition in court says boy, 3, suffered repeated injuries in foster home before his April death.

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

James Earl Bradley Jr. suffered repeated abuse in the Van Buren Township foster home he lived in at the time of his death, according to a petition filed Tuesday in Wayne County Juvenile Court.

Though no one has been charged in James' April 13 death, state officials are petitioning to terminate Christina Woodward's and Lasana Karva Jr.'s parental rights to their two children, ages 15 and 11, who were removed from the home on Monday.

"They're very upset," Ronald Gold, an attorney for the couple, said of the filing's allegations. "That court is so dysfunctional. It's programmed and set up to remove children."

James, 3, died of blunt force trauma to the head six months after being placed in the married couple's foster home, and the petition offers the first glimpse into the painful months leading up to his death.

Among the details: James was treated for injuries on two separate occasions before his final hospitalization. On April 9, James was taken to Oakwood Annapolis Hospital in Wayne and then airlifted to University Hospital, where he died four days later, after being diagnosed with bleeding on the brain and a pelvic fracture.

Woodward told investigators she found James crying and gasping for air in the family's master bedroom.

Four doctors said they could not determine when James was injured, but his behavior would have been abnormal in the days leading up to his hospitalization.

He would have been "tired a lot, vomiting, have a change of appetite or display some abnormal physical facial expressions or strange activity," doctors told investigators. Washtenaw County Medical Examiner Bader Cassin said the fatal injury was sustained the day before James was taken to the hospital.

The couple and their children insisted to investigators that James had been acting normally and had not been injured, but a medical report from U-M disputed their story: "The reported history of normal behavior until just before the EMS was called is not consistent with the severity of his symptoms at the time EMS arrived."

Other conflicting reports were noted in the petition, including the couple's parenting methods.

Children who attended the day care Woodward and Karva ran out of their home told investigators James routinely got into trouble for wetting his pants and getting into the sink.

"(Woodward) would whip him with a long black belt and sometimes with her hand," children at the day care said.

"She would whip him on his legs with her hand when he wet on himself," Linda Edwards, whose three sons attended the day care, told The Detroit News. "James would just cry and cry."

Karva said his wife, the disciplinarian, never used physical punishment.

The couple became foster parents in November, nine years after Woodward, 34, was convicted of domestic violence against Karva, 37. Woodward denied having a history of domestic violence or arrests when she applied to be a foster parent and apparently ran the day care out of her basement even after being denied permission, according to the petition.

Two months after James was placed with the family, James' birth mother noticed a bump on his forehead during a visit and took him for medical treatment. Two months later, he was treated after being burned by scalding water from a faucet. The foster care agency cited Woodward after that incident for turning the hot water temperature up very high at night.

Woodward told slightly conflicting stories to police and emergency and medical officials about the night she found James.

Initially, she said she and her 15-year-old daughter were on the main floor of the home and heard a noise upstairs. They found James on the floor next to a blanket and pillow. But Woodward later changed her story, saying her daughter was already in the bedroom when she went upstairs.

Detectives say the investigation is ongoing but court documents indicate that the couple, along with their daughter, son and their maternal grandmother, are under investigation.

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Detroit foster mother convicted in 2-year-old's death

Midday update

Associated Press

DETROIT - A woman was convicted Monday of involuntary manslaughter and child abuse in the death of her 2-year-old foster child, who witnesses say was left in the care of a mentally disturbed and violent girl.

Jurors rejected the defense argument that Charlsie Adams-Rogers should not be held legally responsible for the fatal beating of Isaac Lethbridge.

The prosecution said the 60-year-old Detroit woman failed in her duty to supervise and protect Isaac, who died Aug. 16.

The jury acquitted Adams-Rogers of a misdemeanor child-abuse charge involving Isaac's sister Emma, who was 4 at the time of his death.

Adams-Rogers faces up to 15 years in prison on the manslaughter charge and up to four years for second-degree child abuse when she is sentenced July 2. Wayne County Circuit Judge Vera Massey Jones ordered her held without bond.

According to the defense, Adams-Rogers' mentally disturbed and violent adopted daughter, then 12, fatally beat Isaac, and the woman should not be held responsible.

The prosecution insisted that Adams-Rogers' was accountable. The girl has not been charged in the death.

In Isaac's final hours, the woman never bothered to go upstairs to see why he was crying, Assistant Prosecutor Lisa Lindsey said in closing arguments.

An autopsy concluded that a blow from a blunt object or fist caused Isaac's brain to hemorrhage.

Witnesses said the boy's body showed burns by an iron and cigarettes, and multiple bruises from metal rods or sticks.



Suspect in baby's death to face trial

Wednesday, June 20, 2007

THE SAGINAW NEWS

BAD AXE -- A jury will decide the fate of a 21-year-old Huron County man facing accusations that he beat his girlfriend's 19-month-old son to death in April.

Circuit Judge M. Richard Knoblock on Monday ordered Brandon S. Smith to stand trial on one count of first-degree murder in the death of Nickolas Crowell.

Knoblock set a 9 a.m. Tuesday, Sept. 25, trial for Smith, who stood mute at his Circuit Court arraignment.

The tot died April 5 of blunt force trauma to his abdomen. Crowell suffered the injuries at the Bad Axe home where Smith lived with the boy's mother, 19-year-old Ashley Walls.

Walls and her mother, Brenda Walls, had gone to a Wal-Mart to buy Easter candy and had left the boy in Smith's care. Medical Examiner Dr. Kanu Virani has said an autopsy revealed Crowell had multiple injuries, including two broken ribs from a previous trauma.

Virani has said the injuries could not have resulted from a fall. v

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Article published Jun 19, 2007

Charges dismissed in infant's death

By Annette Kingsbury
Staff Writer

The charges against a nanny suspected in the death of a Rochester infant were dropped last week and it's uncertain whether she will face charges again.

At the request of prosecutors, 52-3 District Court Judge Nancy Carniak on Thursday dismissed homicide, manslaughter and child-abuse charges filed in March against Kelly Marie Waller of Madison Heights. Waller, 30, was one of two nannies working for the parents of Ajay Bose, who was 9 weeks old when he died July 31, 2006.

Rochester police were called to the family home July 14 when the baby was found unresponsive. Doctors at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak said he had bleeding on the brain consistent with shaken baby syndrome.

A preliminary exam on the charges had been postponed earlier this month and was scheduled to begin June 26.

Chief Deputy Oakland County Prosecutor Deborah Carley said the investigation is continuing. She said the case has been complicated because the baby had been premature and because in the two weeks between the injury and his death, the injury had begun to heal.

"It's been a very difficult case," she said. "It's very frustrating. ... But we have to make sure the case is the best case we can put forward. And we have to have all the experts ready before we have the exam. That's very important. ...

"The time limits now are so tight to get a case through the system that we just didn't want to rush it."

Last August, Rochester police issued a statement saying the cause of death was cranial cerebral trauma.

Police and the prosecutor's office have been working for months to get the medical evidence and expert witnesses together.

"We've assigned two prosecutors. One is a child abuse expert, one has extensive medical background," Carley said. "We have some very good experts we are going to talk to from Beaumont Hospital and the University of Michigan."

Waller's attorney, James Thomas, did not return a phone call seeking comment Tuesday.

Carley said it's difficult to say whether the prosecutor will charge Waller again at a later date.

"It's going to take some time," she said.



Muskegon Chronicle

Mom gets prison in sex contract case

Tuesday, June 19, 2007

By John S. Hausman

jhausman@muskegonchronicle.com

A Muskegon Heights mother is headed to prison for 12 to 22 1/2 years for arranging to have her boyfriend and her 15-year-old daughter be sex partners for two months while the woman recuperated from surgery.

The Chronicle is not identifying the woman to protect the daughter, who is a victim of sex abuse and not charged with any crime in the case. The daughter is now living with a court-approved guardian.

"It's true that (the defendant) didn't do the act herself, but she set it up," said 14th Circuit Judge Timothy G. Hicks in pronouncing sentence. "You both created a danger to the child.

"I only hope that your daughter, who's been very brave ... can find some peace here," Hicks said. "What you've done to your daughter is one of the worst things I can think of."

The 41-year-old woman pleaded no contest as charged April 17 to three counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct (aiding and abetting) with a person between the ages of 13 and 15. A no-contest plea is not an admission of guilt, but judges treat it as a guilty plea at sentencing. Authorities said the woman confessed to the crimes before her no-contest plea, after earlier claiming innocence.

The case arose after the woman, afraid of losing her boyfriend, Michael Jon Fitzgibbon, while recuperating from abdominal surgery, arranged to have her daughter be his sex partner last year. Evidence includes the girl's testimony about a "contract" signed by all three that specified sexual services and the "pay" the girl would get.

At the woman's 60th District Court probable-cause hearing last September, the girl testified that her mother presented her with the agreement in early June 2006, the night before the first time the sex happened.

In exchange, the girl would get privileges, such as piercings and hair dye, and be allowed to stay with her own boyfriend overnight, the girl testified. The daughter eventually told another adult what was going on, which led to a police investigation and the arrest of Fitzgibbon and the mother.

At her sentencing Monday, the weeping mother told the judge she would never hurt her children.

Her 12-year minimum sentence was near the top end of state sentencing guidelines. The Muskegon County Prosecutor's Office asked for a sentence above the guidelines, citing the heinousness of the crime.

"She exposed her (daughter) to sexual deviancies and allowed her to be exploited with these acts carrying on for weeks, two to three times per week," said Senior Assistant Prosecutor Dale J. Hilson, who prosecuted the case. "It's extremely upsetting to me that she could stand here and express concern for her children."

Her public defender, Fred J. Lesica, asked for a minimum sentence near the bottom of state guidelines, calling the woman "a very fragile individual" and citing her own history of sexual and physical abuse as a child, her sixth-grade education, and medical conditions that he said include asthma, depression and bipolar disorder.

"I believe she was manipulated by Mr. Fitzgibbon," Lesica said. "Unfortunately, she went along with this situation, whether she understood it completely."

An aunt of the victim read a letter from the girl, now 16, asking the judge for the maximum sentence. "I have been through more than most adults can dream of," she wrote. She said her mother physically abused her, leaving bruises and scars, and threatened to have the girl's boyfriend arrested for having sex with the girl if she told on Fitzgibbon.

Fitzgibbon, 38, earlier pleaded no contest to four counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct in the case and was sentenced to prison for seven to 15 years. In a separate case of first-degree criminal sexual conduct with a 12-year-old girl, Fitzgibbon was sentenced to prison for 12 to 25 years.

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Molestation case jury hears of boy's trauma

Wednesday, June 20, 2007

By Barton Deiters

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Her son was an award-winning student of the year when the 8-year-old suddenly started getting a stomachache every Friday and saying he could not go to school.

He started struggling in school, wetting the bed, having nightmares and is now on medication for anxiety.

Looking back, this mother wonders whether she should have made the connection that the stomachaches were occurring on the same day he had music class with teacher Ronald Taylor, who now faces 15 counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct with nine boys younger than 11, including her son.

"The bed-wetting started a month after school started," she told a Kent County Circuit Court jury just minutes after her son had testified Taylor had touched his "private parts."

The 8-year-old was the first of the children expected to testify over the next two weeks about how the 39-year-old teacher touched them inappropriately last summer and fall, leading Grand Rapids Public Schools to dismiss Taylor from his job at Martin Luther King Jr. Learning Academy and Buchanan Elementary School.

Kent County Assistant Prosecutor Kevin Bramble said the molestation took place at the schools, during camping trips, at the home of Taylor's parents and in the back row of Blythefield Hills Baptist Church in Rockford.

The 8-year-old said Taylor molested him in the music room at MLK while other students lined up to leave.

"It didn't feel right," the boy said, admitting he did not want to tell anyone about it.

A 7-year-old boy said Taylor reached into his pants and fondled him under the pretense of tucking in his shirt.

"He was tickling him under his privates and asked if it felt like a little mouse," the boy's mother testified that her son had told her while riding home from school one day last fall. "It was completely unsolicited, completely out of the blue."

Bramble plans to call most, if not all, of the alleged victims.

Taylor's defense attorney, Fil Iorio, said the interest in the case has been the problem. In his opening statement he said the young, unreliable witnesses have been tainted by information from their parents, friends, relatives, police and the media.

He points out that all nine of the accusers know each other and in many cases are related by blood.

Send e-mail to the author: bdeiters@grpress.com



Couple may lose their children after foster child's death

June 19, 2007

By JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

State child abuse investigators are seeking to terminate the parental rights of two Van Buren Township foster parents to their two biological children on grounds that they are suspects in the murder of a 3-year-old foster boy in their home.

Christine Woodward, 34, and Lasana Kanva, Jr., 37, are expected to attend a preliminary hearing in Wayne County juvenile court this afternoon on a petition by the state Department of Human Services to terminate their rights to their children, a 15-year-old girl and 11-year-old son.

Woodward and Kanva have denied causing any harm to their foster child, James Bradley Jr. of Detroit, who died of blunt force trauma and brain swelling on April 13 at the University of Michigan Mott's Children's Hospital.

The parents and their children give similar stories about finding James unconscious in an upstairs bedroom on May 8. But doctors at Mott have called James' severe injuries the result of child abuse.

The only people who had access to James within two days before Kanva's call to 911 that day were the family and Woodward's mother, Janice Johnson, 50, of Detroit, according to reports filed in the juvenile court.

An autopsy by Washtenaw County Medical Examiner Dr. Bader Cassin said James died of head injuries, including a skull fracture that led to brain swelling. Cassin ruled the manner of death as homicide.

Through an attorney, the couple has denied any wrongdoing.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at jkresnak@freepress.com.

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Man assaulted daughter with belt, police say

By Michael Jones, Staff Writer

GAYLORD — A 37-year-old Gaylord man was arrested and arraigned Monday after investigators from the Gaylord and Petoskey Michigan State Police (MSP) posts allege he struck his 2-year-old daughter numerous times with a belt Saturday, causing extensive injuries to the child's arms, legs and back.

Walter Xavier Baker was arrested at his Gaylord residence on a charge of third-degree child abuse (did knowingly or intentionally cause physical harm) and habitual offender third offense. Officials from the Gaylord post reported troopers took the child to Otsego Memorial Hospital (OMH) for treatment of her injuries. She was released into protective custody.

According to Gaylord MSP post reports, the incident occurred Saturday morning at Baker's residence where his daughter was spending the weekend for a parental visit. The child's mother also resides in Gaylord.

A trooper from the Petoskey post was on foot patrol at Thumb Lake beach on Thumb Lake Road in Charlevoix County, approximately four miles west of Vanderbilt, when he reportedly observed a number of bruises and contusions on the girl's body. He questioned adults who were at the beach with Baker's daughter. According to Sgt. Denny Reynolds of the Gaylord post, among the adults was a woman who lives at Baker's residence. She told the trooper she had taken the child to the beach with other children after the alleged beating to give Baker time to cool down.

Petoskey troopers turned the investigation over to the Gaylord post once it was determined the alleged abuse had occurred in Otsego County. Troopers said the woman indicated the alleged beating occurred because the child was misbehaving. Authorities said Baker denied injuring the child.

After completing their investigation, troopers obtained an arrest warrant for Baker who was taken into custody at his residence Monday without incident. He was transported to the Otsego County Jail where he remains lodged on a \$5,000 cash surety bond while awaiting a June 28 preliminary hearing at 1:30 p.m. in District Court.

Baker was charged with third-degree child abuse, a two-year felony, as well a habitual offender charge which carries a possible four-year prison term. Reynolds said Baker was on parole for a previous breaking entering charge. According to information obtained from the state of Michigan Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS) Web site, Baker was convicted of home invasion second degree from a 1999 incident in Saginaw County.



School board expels middle school student

Tuesday, June 19, 2007

COREY MITCHELL

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Saginaw Township Board of Education members have expelled a White Pine Middle School student facing charges of assaulting a classmate in a restroom.

With help from an accomplice, the 14-year-old student dragged the 14-year-old victim into a restroom and pounded him bloody and unconscious, police say.

When the victim's parents arrived at White Pine the day of the attack, the boy couldn't remember their names or the days of the week, said his mother, a Saginaw Township resident. The victim suffered a concussion, facial lacerations and memory loss. He returned to classes several days later, his memory still hazy, his mother said.

The student faces charges of aggravated assault in juvenile court. The teen could serve probation or time behind bars.

The expulsion for the student-on-student assault requires him to miss at least 180 days of school. While he may apply for reinstatement, school board members don't have to accept him.

The Saginaw News could not immediately reach the victim's mother for comment Monday.

White Pine Principal Bonnie Eaves told The Saginaw News that the fight started over an Apple iPod Nano someone stole from the victim. The victim accused the other student of taking it.

The student who actually stole the music device stepped forward several days after the attack, Eaves said.

Before Monday's action, school board members had expelled three students in 2006-07, all from Heritage High School. v

Corey Mitchell covers education. You may reach him at 776-9677.

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Posters

Gaylord Herald Times

• Posted: Tuesday, June 19, 2007 9:02 AM EDT

vicki detzler

I think Rudi has made a good choice. We have a lot of fathers and mothers out there who don't pay. I know that sometimes it is hard but we all have hard times and we just have to try. I never received child support and it was hard for me. Also I believe that the posters all around is a good idea. I would want one of my friends to tell me if I had one. Sure it might be embarrassing but if that is what it takes to get people to turn themselves in then it needs to be done. But I also believe that if they turn themselves in it should be taken off the site right away not 3 weeks later. Sometimes people are innocent and still get accused of things they don't do, I know it has happened to me. So Rudi all I can say it is a very good idea as long as you also do the proper thing on your part as well. If you did the crime then you need to do the time.

vicki



Gift of transportation solves agency problem

Wednesday, June 20, 2007

MARY L. LAWRENCE

THE SAGINAW NEWS

A volunteer with a big truck has come to the aid of the Saginaw Community Action Committee in time for next week's quarterly distribution of federal government supplemental food.

David and Piper A. Lumsden, founders of His Ministry in Saginaw and owners of the Saber Line Transportation trucking company, volunteered to transport the food for free.

His Ministry is a nonprofit nondenominational outreach ministry that helps families and individuals struggling to make ends meet. Based in a warehouse at 3350 Carver in Saginaw Township, His Ministry distributes free food, clothing, household items and Christian literature.

Sue Soriteu, food service manager for the anti-poverty Community Action Committee, 2824 Perkins in Saginaw, said the number of calls from people wanting to help solve the agency's dilemma overwhelmed her.

"After the article in The Saginaw News about our need for a semi-truck, our phone started ringing off the hook," Soriteu said.

The seven or so groups wanting to help included Baker College, Meijer Inc. and Art Van furniture.

"I was truly touched by the generosity," Soriteu said. "There are lot of kind-hearted, caring people in this community who care about hungry people."

A May 28 report in The News told how a contract dispute left the committee without a transporter to bring boxes of canned food to Saginaw in time for the scheduled distribution. The disagreement also left the agency temporarily without transportation funds.

Soriteu said His Ministry will provide them with a 53-foot-long tractor trailer.

"That's plenty big enough," she said. v

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Kalamazoo Gazette

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tuesday, June 19, 2007

Department did not add bureaucracy

In his May 27 Viewpoint, John Dillworth had his facts wrong about the Department of Human Services. In fact, the DHS just reduced -- not increased -- the number of deputy directors in the department by two. The safety of children and vulnerable adults is our first priority, and that is where we have focused scarce resources throughout these difficult budget times. We did not -- and will not -- add more bureaucracy or more layers.

Karen Stock
Director of Communications
Department of Human Services